

This is an official

DHEC Health Advisory

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Clusters of Gastrointestinal Illness in Institutional Settings in the Upstate and Piedmont

Background Information

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control is investigating several clusters of gastrointestinal illness in institutional settings/long-term care facilities scattered across the state. Six of the clusters have been confirmed as being associated with Norovirus (Norwalk-like virus); test results for the other clusters are pending.

Norovirus is a highly infectious, short-duration, self-limiting gastrointestinal virus. Sporadic cases are common in South Carolina and throughout the United States. Clusters of norovirus cases often occur in closed populations such as schools, childcare centers, nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, military boot camps, and cruise ships. Currently there are increased reports of Norovirus across SC, especially in the Upstate and Piedmont areas of South Carolina, as well as surrounding states.

Clinical Information

Norovirus occurs in all age groups. Transmission is by person-to-person through the fecal-oral route, or in contaminated food or water. As few as 10 virus particles may be infective. Norovirus can also be spread via contact with contaminated surfaces and through aerosolization of vomitus. The incubation period is 12-72 hours, usually between 24-48 hours. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting and watery, non-bloody diarrhea, fever, headache, malaise, body aches, and abdominal cramps. Symptoms usually last 24-60 hours. Shedding of the virus may occur for up to two weeks after symptoms subside. Death may occur, associated with severe dehydration. Supportive therapy includes oral or intravenous rehydration to replace fluids and electrolytes.

Recommended Guidance for Control of Norovirus in Institutional Settings

Transfer and discharge of patients between hospitals and long-term care facilities should be curtailed during an outbreak. Symptomatic patients should be maintained in their current facility, unless transfer is required to provide acute medical care.

Control of norovirus and other gastrointestinal viruses is dependent on isolation of infected individuals and thorough disinfection. Norovirus is resistant to heat and cold, and to many common disinfectants. The recommended disinfectant solution is a freshly mixed 1:10 dilution of chlorine bleach in water. Particular care should be taken to disinfect doorknobs, handrails, and other commonly touched surfaces.

To decrease spread of Norovirus, children, health care workers, and food handlers infected with norovirus should not attend school or work until 24 hours past resolution of symptoms and observe strict hygiene for two weeks.

In outbreaks in nursing homes or long-term care facilities:

- ◆ Frequent hand washing is one of the most important control measures.
- ◆ Infected patients should remain in their rooms.
- ◆ Group activities may be suspended.
- ◆ Visitation may be limited or suspended.

- ◆ All persons (visitors, therapists, staff, etc.) entering the facility should wash their hands prior to and after any contact with residents, food or potentially contaminated surfaces.
- ◆ Staff should apply standard infection control practices, including implementing contact precautions when caring for symptomatic patients.
- ◆ Infected or symptomatic individuals should not use shared water facilities (whirlpools, aqua therapy) for two weeks after symptoms subside.

Additional information about Norovirus

Viral gastroenteritis: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/faq.htm>

Norovirus Q & A: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-qa.htm>

Norovirus technical fact sheet: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-factsheet.htm>

Norovirus in healthcare facilities: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/id_norovirusFS.html

Norovirus and food handlers: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-foodhandlers.htm>

DHEC Contact Information for Reportable Diseases and Reporting Requirements

Reporting of outbreaks/clusters of cases is consistent with South Carolina Law requiring the reporting of diseases and conditions to your state or local public health department. (State Law # 44-29-10 and Regulation # 61-20) as per the DHEC 2004 List of Reportable Conditions available at:
http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/docs/reportable_conditions.pdf

Federal HIPAA legislation allows disclosure of protected health information, without consent of the individual, to public health authorities to collect and receive such information for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease. (HIPAA 45 CFR §164.512).

Regional Public Health Offices

Call reports to the Epidemiology Office in each Public Health Region.

Region 1

(Anderson, Oconee)

220 McGee Road
Anderson, SC 29625
Phone: (864) 231-1966
Fax: (864) 260-5623
Nights / Weekends: 1-866-298-4442

(Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Saluda)

P.O. Box 3227
1736 S. Main Street
Greenwood, SC 29646
Phone: 1-888-218-5475
Fax: (864) 942-3690
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-420-1915

Region 2

(Greenville, Pickens)

P.O. Box 2507
200 University Ridge
Greenville, SC 29602-2507
Phone: (864) 282-4139
Fax: (864) 282-4373
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-993-1186

(Cherokee, Spartanburg, Union)

P.O. Box 4217
151 E. Wood Street
Spartanburg, SC 29305-4217
Phone: (864) 596-2227 ext. 210
Fax: (864) 596-3443
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-993-1186

Region 3

(Chester, Lancaster, York)

P.O. Box 817
1833 Pageland Highway
Lancaster, SC 29721
Phone: (803) 286-9948
Fax: (803) 286-5418
Nights / Weekends: 1-866-867-3886

(Fairfield, Lexington, Newberry, Richland)

2000 Hampton Street
Columbia, SC 29204
Phone: (803) 576-2749
Fax: (803) 576-2993
Nights / Weekends: 1-888-554-9915

Region 4

(Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, Sumter)

P.O. Box 1628
105 North Magnolia Street
Sumter, SC 29150
Phone: (803) 773-5511
Fax: (803) 775-9941
Nights/Weekends: 1-877-831-4647

(Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marlboro, Marion)

145 E. Cheves Street
Florence, SC 29506
Phone: (843) 661-4830
Fax: (843) 661-4859
Nights / Weekends: (843) 660-8145

Region 5

(Bamberg, Calhoun, Orangeburg)

P.O. Box 1126
1550 Carolina Avenue
Orangeburg, SC 29116
Phone: (803) 533-7199
Fax: (803) 533-7134
Nights / Weekends: (803) 954-8513

Region 5 (cont)

(Aiken, Allendale, Barnwell)

1680 Richland Avenue, W. Suite 40
Aiken, SC 29801
Phone: (803) 642-1618
Fax: (803) 643-8386
Nights / Weekends: (803) 827-8668 or
1-800-614-1519

Region 6

(Georgetown, Horry, Williamsburg)

2830 Oak Street
Conway, SC 29526-4560
Phone: (843) 365-3126, ext. 138 or ext. 174
Fax: (843) 365-3153
Nights / Weekends: (843) 381-6710

Region 7

(Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester)

4050 Bridge View Drive, Suite 600
N. Charleston, SC 29405
Phone: (843) 746-3806
Fax: (843) 746-3851
Nights / Weekends: (843) 219-8470

Region 8

(Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, Jasper)

219 S. Lemacks Street
Walterboro, SC 29488
Phone: (843) 549-1516, ext 214
Fax: (843) 549-6845
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-614-4698

Bureau of Disease Control

Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology

1751 Calhoun Street
Box 101106
Columbia, SC
Phone: (803) 898-0861
Fax: (803) 898-0897
Nights / Weekends: 1-888-847-0902

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.